16: Collinson--200-202 (1852-53) 1855 Copper Eskimo
116, 105

"On our arrival, [in Cambridge Bay] we at once established a communication with the natives, who were diffident at first, this being their earliest communication with white men. The number hunting in the immediate vicinity amounted to less than 100, but before the winter set in others resorted to Cambridge Bay, attracted no doubt by the wonderful novelty. They belong to the Central tribe of Esquimaux, wearing the same costume and speaking a similar dialect to the Igloolik and Boothia Isthmus people; and unlike Greenland and Behring Strait tribes, who perform almost all their migrations by sea, these people travel over the land and ice with sleighs. The journey to Victoria Land is performed previous to the breaking up of the ice in the summer, and having no oomiaks, and but one or two kayaks, their communication with the continent is cut off until the straits are bridged over by the frost; they then assemble between Cape Colborne and the Finlayson Islands, which is the great crossing-place for the reindeer, and, after they have obtained as many as possible, pick up their caches of fish and venison, and return to the continent for the winter. They frequently visited us, bringing children of all ages even upon the coldest days, but we only could induce them once to remain all night, when they enjoyed the dancing and singing upon the lower deck, and went to rest perfectly satisfied. Unfortunately, the following morning was the usual one for the weekly inspection of the men under arms; and after breakfast, when the ship's company began to take down their muskets and cutlasses, they became alarmed, and crept away before

we were aware of it. Otherwise they were upon very good terms, becoming latterly expert in picking up whatever they could lay their hands upon, and occasioning the necessity of a vigilant look out. [201]

In addition to their performing their annual migration on land instead of by water, they differ from the other tribes by inhabiting snow houses during the winter, and have therefore no fixed place of abode, all their necessaries being carried upon sleighs. The house is built in the course of two or three hours, and all trace of it disappears in the ensuing summer. Very few iron implements were found among them, the most warlike being a spear-shaped knife made of native copper; while their arrows are tipped with the same, or made of bone and flint. On one occasion they were induced to show their skill by shooting from the forecastle at the mast-head vane, and struck it frequently. They seldom cook their food, the frost apparently acting as a substitute for fire. Biscuit and sugar the children latterly acquired a taste for, but salt appeared always an abomination.

The do not use drift-wood or grass for fuel, but content themselves with the stone-lamp fed by seals' blubber, which enables them to thaw the snow for a drink. Spirits and tobacco they have as yet no notion of; and, unlike their brethren on the E. and W., are free from vermin on their persons. A distance of several years was always observed to intervene in the ages of the children of the same family, which must be occasioned, I presume, by the difficulty of supporting them. All the drudgery falls upon the women;

even the boys would transfer their loads to their sisters. Bears' claws, deer's teeth, and bills of birds are hung about their coats; the mothers frequently pointing with pride to these evidences of success in their children. The limited means of communication which we possessed prevented our ascertaining whether any form of religion existed. One man of the tribe lived by himself in a tent, and appeared to be regarded as the Angekok. The dresses with the exception of those of the young girls and children, who use bear-skin, were made almost entirely of rein-deer skins sewed together with sinew by copper needles. Some of the men were tall and well made; the distinguishing features being a broad face, square forehead, and flat nose; hair coarse and black, no whiskers, and but little on the upper lip and chin. The women are generally low of stature, and disfigured on the cheek by tattooing. Among those seen the preceding year were a few with aquiline noses and a Jewish cast of countenance, forming a curious contrast with the remainder of the tribe. The tribes appear to be separated from each other by a neutral ground, across which small parties venture in the summer for barter. The limit of these people westerly appears to be the Dolphin and Union Strait, beyond which the costume alters--the oomiak and the labret appear, showing an immediate connexion with the Behring Strait tribe. They do not, however, extend all the way to Point Barrow, but terminate at Herschel Island, whence, in the summer, trading [202] parties resort to Barter Island, where they meet not only the Point Barrow people, but also the Rat Indians, who descend from the Hudson Bay Company's post, Fort Yucon, and barter

muskets, powder, beads, and knives, for furs. A party of these Indians were brought on board by the Esquimaux just as we were leaving Camden Bay, in July, 1854, when they at once produced a note from Mr. Hardisty, the clerk in charge of that post."